This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

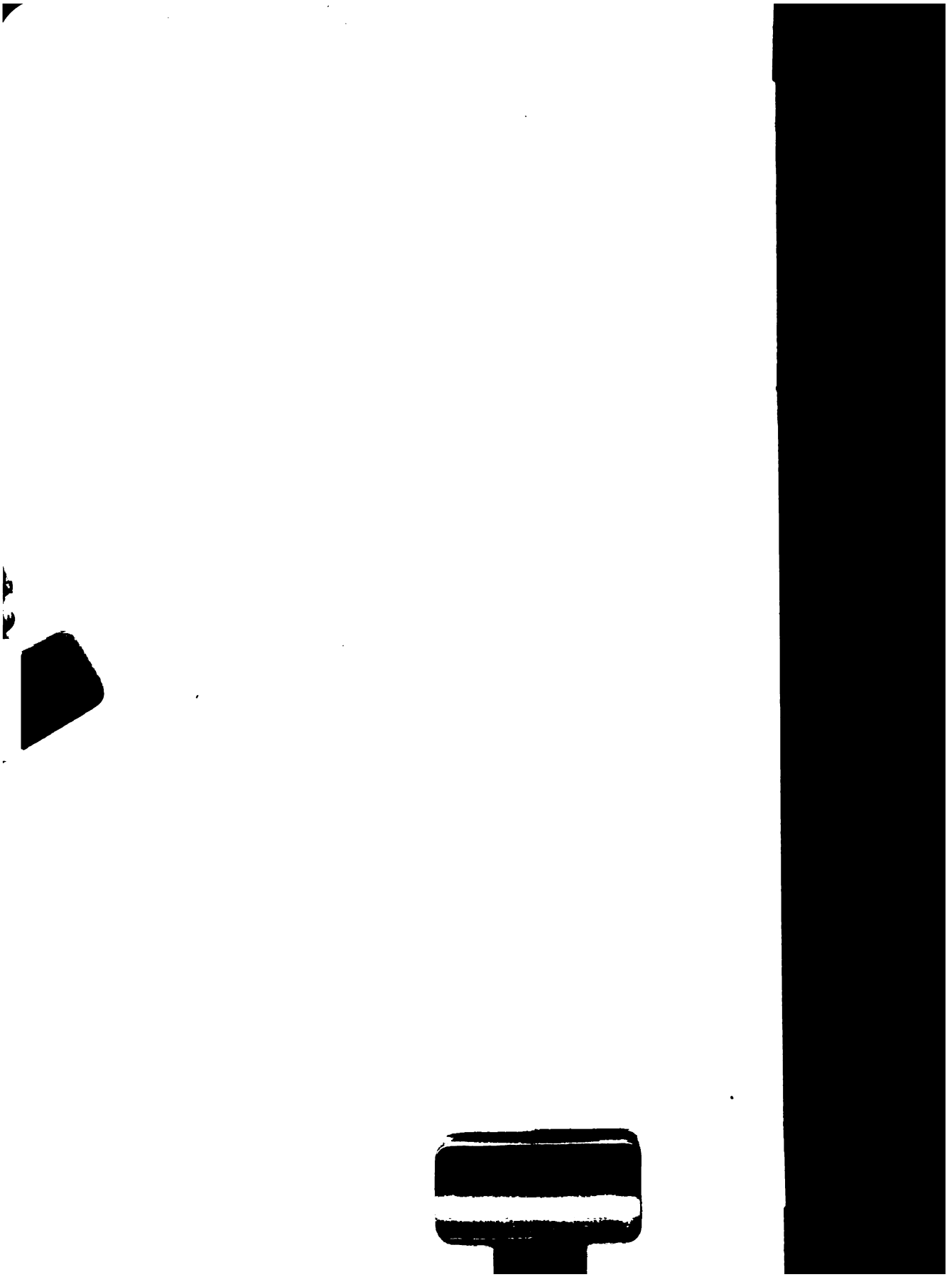
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

BS
SM47



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON
LIBRARY

BS
SM47

NATURE'S THEOLOGY.

BY

GERRIT SMITH

1867.

FOR SALE BY
REV. J. W. WEST, PETERBORO, NEW-YORK.
PRICE, 15 CENTS, SINGLE COPIES; 1.25 PER DOZEN.
NO CHARGE FOR POSTAGE.

Library of the
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
MADISON

NATURE THE BASIS

OF

A TRUE THEOLOGY.

EXISTING THEOLOGIES FALSE,

BECAUSE LACKING THIS BASIS.

BY

GERRIT SMITH.

SECOND EDITION.

FOR SALE BY

REV. J. W. WEST, PETERBORO, NEW-YORK.

1867.

NATURE THE BASIS OF A TRUE THEOLOGY.

THE scientific study of nature, in her earth, sea, and sky, should be our chief mental employment; for then should we be kept in the sphere of facts and certainties, and from confounding fancies with facts and fictions with certainties. Thus kept, we should increase rapidly in the knowledge of God and man. The human family is still very low and very unhappy. But very high and very happy would it have been had progress in natural science been, in all ages, its leading aim. Even now, and this too in the most favored lands, such is the aim of but here and there an individual. The masses nowhere tax themselves with study. Hence their ignorance, and their liability to listen to the shallow and crafty more than to the wise and upright. Especially little do they study natural science—that science, which, more than all other knowledge, protects and redeems from superstition and from the designs and delusions of the priesthood. I say delusions as well as designs; for, designing as is a large part of the priesthood, a larger part is deluded.

How heaven-high above its present condition and character would humanity have been if, when Jesus began his ministry of light and love, there had been the present progress in astronomy and geology for that ministry to blend with! In unavoidable adaptation to their petty and fanciful universe, the early Christians adopted, and, in part, constructed, a petty and fanciful theology. The whole of their universe was the earth, with a not very large ball of fire, revolving around it, to light and warm it by day, and with candles, stuck here and there in the sky, to serve it at night. And what to them was the earth? A fixed plane, perhaps hardly exceeding Russia either in extent of

territory or population. And what, then, to them, must have been the God who was charged with no wider care than all this amounts to? Surely it is no wonder that He should have been, in their esteem, but little more than the Big Man that the Jews believed Him to be. Consistently, indeed, might they hold that He, like other men, was the subject of change, of burning revenge, and relenting sorrow; that He was capable of hating His own offspring—ay, and, as in the case of Esau, of hating them even before they were born. No effort did it require to believe that such a God had built a hell—even an eternal hell—for the mass of His children. Nothing was easier than for one race to believe, as did the Jews, that this poor, puny, passionate, prejudiced God hated the other races in His narrow dominions, and gave them all up to be despised, and some of them to be destroyed, by the favorite race. In a word, nothing was easier than for a bigoted and bloody people to claim the affinity and countenance of such a God and assure itself of His authority for the commission of its greatest crimes.

How different from this infinitesimal part of nature, which the early Christians took to be the whole of nature, are the wonders which astronomy has opened upon our vision! To say that one no more resembles the other than does a mole-hill a mountain, is to illustrate their difference very faintly. The earth, instead of being well-nigh the all of nature, proves to be but a very small part of the solar system, and scarce a speck in the universe. Even as yet astronomers know very little of that limitless universe. Nevertheless they know of stars whose light has to travel thousands of years before it reaches the earth. Well may Hawthorne say: "If the world were crumbled to the finest dust and scattered through the universe, there would not be an atom of the dust for each star."

But the difference between nature, as seen in the first century and as seen in the nineteenth, is no greater than the difference between a theology, constructed to harmonize with what is now known of nature, and, therefore, of the God of nature, and the theology current before Ptolemy's theory of the heavens and earth, or rather before the theory of Copernicus, since Ptolemy's was not important enough to modify a theology. And yet, alas! Christians still cling to the Christian theology of the

first centuries—a theology made up under the influence of that diminutive view of the Supreme Being which reduced Him to a godling whose sway was hardly wider than is that of the Emperor of Russia. Very sad is it, that a theological system should ever be built in an age of darkness respecting nature, and of consequent ignorance respecting her Author. But sadder still is it that, when an age of light has come, such a system of falsehood should be allowed to usurp the place of ascertained truth, and that such a creature of the benighted past should be forced upon the enlightened present.

What a deplorable and disgusting spectacle does the disingenuous Christian Church present! She claims to be, by force of her infallible traditions, her infallible Bible and its infallible interpretations, the infallible teacher of mankind. And yet she is busy in shutting out from her dark inclosures the constantly and every-where breaking light of natural science. Or, when she can not do this, she stoutly denies the existence of this light. Or, when she can do neither, but is compelled to let in and confess this light, she impudently claims that she always enjoyed it; that they, who wrote the Bible, or the Spirit that prompted them, enjoyed it; and that, even in her earliest days and when all else was in darkness, she was illumined with all the knowledge necessary to guide her in constructing a perfect system of theology—a system perfect for all ages. As an instance of this shutting out and of this denying the light, the Church prates much as she did a thousand years ago, about the universality of the deluge and about man's being a recent creation. In all this, she, of course, ignores the counter testimony of monuments and ruins and geology. Even the orthodox Hugh Miller's arguments against that universality have but little weight with persons who suffer a line here and a line there in the Bible to outweigh the certain and conclusive proofs of natural science. At the late anniversary, in Nottingham, of the British Scientific Association, it was found that every member of it, except Professor Owen, held Darwin's evolution hypothesis instead of the Bible or special-creation hypothesis. But Darwin, although fortified by such names as Spencer and Lyell, and by all the discovered proofs in the crust of the earth of the remote antiquity of the human race, avails nothing with the

creed-bound against the words of a book, written no one knows when, nor by whom; and which, by the way, is no more one book than a dozen pamphlets, written in a dozen different centuries, would become one book by being stitched together. As an instance of the other disingenuousness to which I have referred—her twisting of the Scriptures and of herself into an agreement with science when its teachings can no longer be resisted—the Church, in order to meet the facts and demonstrations of geology, now holds that the six days in which God created the world are no longer to be taken as literal days, but each one as an infinitely long period of time!—and that the Bible representation of the sun and moon's standing still, or of the earth's being a fixed plane and all the heavens revolving around it, is to be taken no longer as the statement of a fact, but only of an appearance!

How much longer must this theological trash be allowed to abuse our patience! How much longer must the darkness and the myths of the past be allowed to shut out the light and facts of the present! How much longer must men and women be required to get into children's clothes! These theologies, well enough suited to the days when they were invented, are as little suited to our day as is the infant's swaddling to bodily maturity. Even the great central myth of the Christian theology—that God sent His "only-begotten Son" on an errand to this world—was, after all, not so preposterous an invention as many take it to be. For the petty God, of whom this is affirmed, was believed, at the time of this invention, to have no other world to see to than a small part of the earth, on which was only a small part of the population of the whole earth. But how great the folly of adhering to this story after astronomers have proved that there are numberless worlds; and that God would, therefore, have needed not an "only-begotten Son," but numberless sons, in order that each of these worlds might have its visitor—ay, and have him for thirty or forty years! The story in question does very well in connection with a petty God and his petty province; but how silly and sickening it is when associated with the true God and His boundless universe! It is due, however, to the priesthood to add that it will no more suffer itself, in this case than in others, to be cornered by the

astronomers. Its ingenuity opens two doors of escape. First, this is the only world in which there is sin, and, therefore, the only one which the "only-begotten Son" had need to visit. Second, it calls Jesus God, and can therefore admit, for the sake of the argument, that every one of the worlds is so sinful as to require a visit from him. For, if he is God, he could visit them all—ay, and simultaneously.

Oh! when will the theologies—these immeasurably greatest obstacles in all ages and nations to human progress—come to an end! When will the Christian theology, which, by force of its few foolish and wicked words about witches and witchcraft, is responsible for the murder of many thousands; which, by force of its cruel and causeless curse upon Canaan, made Africa the prey of Christendom, and enslaved scores of millions of her children; which, through its mean falsehoods about deeply wronged woman, was able to put her and to keep her under the foot of man; and which, by its terrors, as groundless as great, robs of peace and hope scores of millions of every generation—when, I ask, will even the Christian theology come to an end? Sooner, probably, than the other theologies, because more light is pouring into its darkness than into theirs. And, yet, it will not be very soon. Men know that they should be religious, and, therefore, they desire to be religious. But, for a long time, the priests will be able to uphold the popular belief that the Christian theology (though in fact the greatest hinderance to religion) is, with all its miracles and monstrosities, identical with religion. Hence, men are afraid to throw off this theology. Afraid are they to hear others say, or even to whisper it to their more than half-convinced selves, that this theology, as a whole, has no known foundation in truth. Men have not yet learned to believe with the beloved Jesus—that best of all men and wisest of all moral teachers—that religion consists simply in doing as we would be done by; or with Paul, that it consists solely in loving our neighbor as ourself.

When we see how numerous and mighty are the interests in which the Christian theology is intrenched, we may well despair of seeing it soon give place to a theology which shall be adjusted to what science teaches of nature. Were the theology of Christendom thus adjusted, down would go her theological

seminaries ; and, with very few exceptions, down would go her churches and priests. Down, too, would go her Bible societies, her tract and missionary societies, and, in short, all her institutions which are based on the recognition of the infallibility of the Bible. In respect to its principles, precepts, and inspirations, the Bible does, indeed, stand far ahead of all other books. Nevertheless, how can a man, whose eyes have been providentially turned to its absurdities and abominations, continue with a good conscience to help circulate it as an infallible authority? How can he longer call on men to believe, and to believe too for the life of their souls, in the nonsense about Jonah and the whale; the dry path through the Red Sea; and the reänimation of dead bodies! More than this, how can he longer call upon them to believe in the fitness of charging the Great Loving Father with putting lying spirits in His children; with putting all Saul's wives into David's bosom; with commanding the cruelest wars, and dooming the conquered men, women, and children to extermination; and with other such things, as only the worst of devils should be charged with!

I notice that orthodox preachers and writers are, of late, repeating with unusual frequency that the Bible is the "Word of God." Whether they do this to shut out from themselves, or from others, or from both, the fast-thickening doubts of the propriety of naming a book, in which there is so much nonsense and so much wickedness, the "Word of God," so it is that it forcibly recalls that similar expedient to save a sinking idolatry, when "all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'" But by no such nor by any other jugglery—no, nor by any means whatever—can the Bible be saved. The wise and truthful parts of it will save themselves. The remainder will perish. Science, in its progress, is winnowing the Bible as well as every thing else. This progress will continue until truth shall have completed her expulsion of falsehood, and until there shall not be left one shred of superstition with which to patch up a tattered theology. I do not forget the wide-spread fear that the casting away of the whole Bible will be one of the results of this progress. Perhaps there is some reason for the fear. But the responsibil-

ity for this calamity would not rest upon science. It would rest on those foolish priests and churches, who, by endeavoring to shut out from the Bible the searching light of science, raise an issue between the Bible and science, and, as far as in them lies, necessitate the alternative of accepting the whole Bible with all its folly and sin, or of rejecting it with all the priceless good there is in it. If the position, "The whole Bible or none of it," shall result in "none of it," then they, and they only, who take this bigoted and base position against discriminating science will be chargeable with having robbed the world of the wisest words, which have come down to it from the past.

A miserable world this has ever been because the theologies have ever kept religion under. A happy world will it be when a science-enlightened religion shall get these theologies under. The triumph is sure. The one true religion—the religion of nature and reason, the religion which Jesus loved and lived—will yet get these soul-shriveling and man-crushing theologies under her feet and out of the world.

I have written these sheets with a deep and undoubting conviction that they contain but truth. I, however, foresee that the defender of the Christian theology will be as quick to say of these sheets, as of all I have written on this subject for ten years, that they contain little but falsehood. And yet, my brother, why should you persist in defending this theology? You are conscious that much of it is at war with your experience and observation, and with what you know of nature. But you will say that it comes from the Bible. I admit that part of it does. What proof, however, have you—such proof, I mean, as can abide the laws of evidence—that the Bible is infallible? Not a particle. Your most relied-on reason for saying that this theology is true, is that Jesus says it is. Where does he say so? In the Bible, is your answer. It is not admitted that the Bible says that Jesus recognizes the truth of this theology. But even if it does say so, where is the proof that it is authorized to say so? Nowhere. Again, even if he

did recognize it to be truth, where is the proof that he knew it to be truth? Did he know all things? Even the Bible says that he confessed he did not. Oh! cite not Jesus for your theology! He who taught his disciples to build their "house upon a rock," would be the last man to have them rest in these groundless theological assumptions.

Alas that enlightened men, and men too who are good as well as enlightened, should still continue to accept and circulate these absurd theologies! Sadder than all is it, that they should recognize as religion what is so largely and glaringly a compound of superstition, fraud, cruelty, and curses—and as that religion of reason, justice, and love, which Jesus taught in the years of his ministry, and which nature ever teaches.

89089034029

b89089034029a

89089034029

B89089034029A